# In search of the camp of the IV Scythian Legion near ancient Artaxata: Pokr Vedi 2015–2018


**Abstract**: Participating in the Roman campaign of Emperor Trajan against the Parthians (114–117), the *Legio* IV *Scythica*, was stationed in Artaxata, the capital of the province of Armenia at the time. Its presence there was immortalized on stamped rooftiles, bricks and a monumental inscription discovered at the southern edge of the present-day village of Pokr Vedi. The inscription, carved in limestone, confirms building activities carried out by the Roman army. Inscriptions of this kind were frequently placed on the gates and most important buildings in the legionary camps. The investigation of the alleged location of the army camp on the outskirts of Pokr Vedi involved an array of non-invasive survey methods (surface prospection, aerial photography, interviews with inhabitants, topographical scanning of the terrain and geophysical electrical resistivity and magnetic surveys). The prospection and test excavations in areas selected on the basis of the accumulated survey data were carried out by a joint Polish and Armenian team.

**Key words**: Armenia, Artaxata, Pokr Vedi, non-invasive research, Roman army, *Legio* IV *Scythica*, legionary camp

During the last years of his reign Emperor Trajan conducted a war against the Parthians. The deployment of troops from the camp in Satala constituted a key strategic move on the eve of the war (Bennett 2005: 195). Artaxata was at that time the capital of Armenia. According to the sources, the *Legio* IV *Scythica*, along with the

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*vexillationes* of other legions, peacefully took control of the city in AD 114 (Cass. Dio 68.19.1–5). Archaeological evidence has confirmed the presence of Roman armies both in the city itself and beyond its walls. One such piece of evidence is a monumental inscription discovered in 1967 on the southern border of the village of Pokr Vedi. Its content and size make it a viable choice for decorating one of the buildings constructed in the new legionary camp at the time.

## STATE OF RESEARCH

Artaxata is located in the Ararat Valley, about 40 km south of Yerevan, on the present-day border with Turkey [*Fig. 1*]. It was once a large city situated on 14 hills at the confluence of two rivers: the Araxes and its tributary, bearing the contemporary name of Metsamor. Artaxata was one of the capitals of the Kingdom of Armenia. According to Plutarch, Hannibal the Carthaginian was said to have pointed out the natural advantages of the locality to the Armenian king of Artaxata and urged him to build a city there (Plut. *Vit. Luc.* 31).

Armenian archaeologists assume the borders of the city to have reached as far as the modern-day villages of Lusarat, Nor Kyank and Pokr Vedi (Arakelyan 1982: 20; Tiracyan 1988: 94; Khachatryan 1998: 99; Gyulamiryan 2018: 161–165) [see *Fig. 1*]. The authors of this paper share the opinion with regard to Lusarat, the northern border of the city beginning directly past the 13th and 14th hill. In turn, the contemporary villages east of Artaxata: Pokr Vedi and Nor Kyank, were almost certainly located *extra muros*, as indicated by the outcomes of this project. As for the western boundary, the fact that today the remains of ancient Artaxata lie in the territory of two countries, Armenia and Turkey, and that research is insufficient and restricted by the current political situation, it is especially difficult to trace it. Nothing has been published on the subject so far.

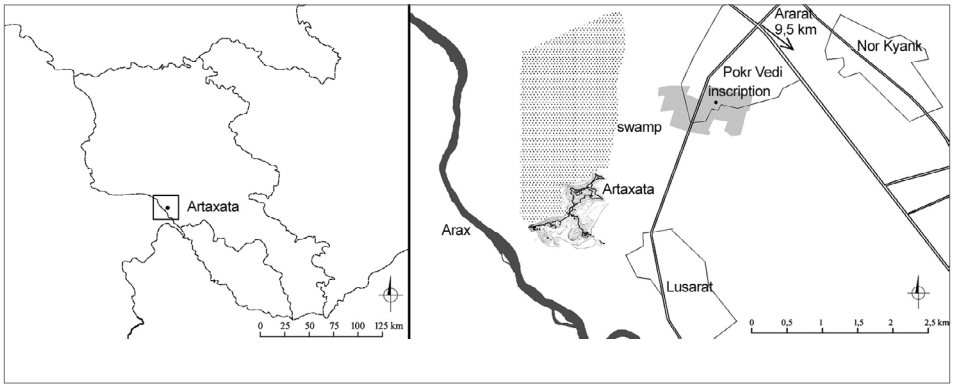


Fig. 1. Artaxata on the map of modern Transcaucasia and a map of the vicinity of Artaxata; the research area is marked light grey (University of Warsaw Pokr Vedi Project | after Khachatryan 1998: Fig. 2; drawing O. Kubrak)

At the northern end, the archaeological site borders with a swampy area, which was a natural barrier for the city's development in antiquity [see *Fig. 1*]. The present-day riverbed of the Araxes cuts through the archaeological site, demarcating the border between Armenia and Turkey. The smaller Metsamor river does not currently flow through this area, and the course of the ancient riverbed has not been traced.

Undoubtedly the most important artifact linked to the presence of the Roman army near Artaxata is a monumental building inscription and a recently discovered tombstone of a soldier from the *Legio* I *Italica*. In order to better understand this discovery, one should compare the inscription with other known texts referring to building investments carried out with the participation of the *Legio* IV *Scythica*.

Not much in the way of epigraphic evidence can be associated with this unit, referred to informally by specialists as a "construction legion" in view of their building activity wherever they were stationed. Inscriptions confirming the participation of the *Legio* IV *Scythica* in construction works are known from the region of the Danube in the vicinity of the Iron Gates (Petrović 2004: 75–76) and from Zeugma (Speidel 2012: 611–612; Crowther 2013: 203–204; Hartmann and Speidel 2013: 386–390). In addition, inscriptions mentioning this legion were found in Tarraco (*CIL* II 4245), Apamea (*CIL* III 335) and Andavtonia (*CIL* III 4013).

The legion was present in central Armenia between 114 and 117, the time of Trajan's Parthian campaign (Arakelyn 1974: 45). Despite the short duration of their stationing here, the Roman soldiers

Imp(erator) Caesar, div[i] Nervae f[il(ius)], N]erva Traianus
Optimus A[u]g(ustus) G[e]rm(anicus) Paci[c(us) Par]thicus, pont(ifex) max(imus),
trib(uncia) pot(estate) X[X, im]p(erator) XIII, co(n)s(ul) VI, [p(ater) p(atriae), pe]r leg(ionem) IIII Scyt(hicam) fecit

Fig. 2. Three-dimensional model of the inscription from Pokr Vedi, now at the National Museum in Yerevan (University of Warsaw Pokr Vedi Project | model O. Kubrak)

left numerous traces of their construction activities, including stamped roof-tiles, bricks (Khachatryan 2006: 230–231, 234) and floor tiles. In 1967, during the installation of water pipes on the southern edges of Pokr Vedi, the Armenian archaeologist B.N. Arakelyan discovered a Latin inscription (Arakelyan 1971: 115–116; 1974: 47; 1982: 19; *AE* 1968: 510; Khachatryan 1981: 23; 2006: 231) [*Fig. 2*] as well as a tombstone of a soldier from the *Legio* I *Italica* [*Fig. 3*] , along with part of an unidentified stone structure and column fragments (Arakelyan 1971: 116–117; 1982: 19; *AE* 1968: 511). Rescue excavations at the time uncovered a number of ceramic fragments dated to the turn of the 1st and 2nd century.

The inscription is dated to AD 116 based on its content. It was well made, the letters stylized as *scriptura monumentalis quadratta*, which was reserved in An-


Fig. 3. Tombstone of a soldier from the *Legio* I *Italica* (University of Warsaw Pokr Vedi Project | photo courtesy M. Zardaryan; drawing after Gyulamiryan 2018: Fig. 1)

tiquity for official inscriptions placed in public places. Trajan's name in the genetive, Traianus, indicates that he was the founder of the inscription and, by default, of the building.[1] It is to be concluded that this unidentified structure was built by the soldiers of the *Legio* IV *Scythica* on commission from the emperor. The artifact is about 7.30 m long, 0.80 m high and from 0.13–0.16 m to 0.20–0.21 m thick. The text fits in three lines, with the letters in the first verse approximately 20 cm high and the other two lines made up of smaller letters of a height between 16 cm and 18 cm (*AE* 1968: 510).[2] The length of the inscription might be construed as indirect evidence for the width of the facade for which it had been prepared.

The slabs of the inscription were of local limestone. The nearest stone quarry from which this raw material could have been obtained is situated a few kilometers south of Artaxata. The most likely scenario is that the inscription was carved after the slabs had been delivered to the construction site and not before. Careful scrutiny of the inscription revealed previously unnoticed traces of a light red pigment originally used to paint the carved letters. This observation, made by Oskar Kubrak and A. Trzop-Szczypiorska, would suggest that the building of which the inscription was a part was completed, contrary to the prevalent opinion to date that the slab had been destroyed during transportation and never reached the construction site.

The dearth of information on the circumstances of the discovery of this inscription contributed to the undertaking the project, which was aimed at gaining a better understanding of Roman army presence in the Araxes Valley. One of the objectives was a search for the structure for which the monumental building inscription was prepared.

The project also aimed to study the archaeological material found outside of the walls of Artaxata. Material from the 1960s and 1970s archaeological excavations in the vicinity of Pokr Vedi were never studied comprehensively, and only very rudimentary information was published in preliminary reports. Without excavation documentation, and sometimes without any documentation whatsoever, it was impossible to reconstruct the circumstances of the discovery of the inscription, not to mention the precise findspot and stratigraphic context.

## RESEARCH METHODS

The research conducted within the framework of the Pokr Vedi Project aimed at finding the remains of the camp of the *Legio* IV *Scythica* stationed in Artaxata (or near the city) in AD 114–117. The project posited the use of a series of non-invasive methods in order to locate with greater precision the areas for verification through excavation. The southern fringes of Pokr Vedi village were surveyed over the course

1 The authors are grateful to the late Prof. Tadeusz Sarnowski, who was the first to point out this important detail.

2 Arakelyan (1971: 116; 1982: 19) gives the length of the inscription as 8.50 m; the remaining dimensions are the same as in *AE*.

of five field seasons (using the GPS-RTK receiving system for locating finds). An array of non-invasive methods was applied, including aerial photography, laser scanning, geophysical prospection (electrical resistivity and magnetic methods), as well as interviews with village inhabitants and participants of the earlier excavations. Trial trenches were planned only as a means of verifying the collected data.

In the initial stage, research was conducted at the National Museum in Yerevan. Permission was obtained to prepare new photographic documentation of the inscription for use in constructing a three-dimensional model of it. Direct access to the artifact revealed previously unregistered traces of red paint inside the carved letters. In addition, library and archive queries were conducted in the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology of the Academy of Sciences of Armenia in Yerevan and in the library of the archaeological database in Lusarat.

A surface survey of the fields south of Pokr Vedi was designed to identify the site of the excavations in 1967. No documentation of this work has been preserved. This spot was approximately 2 km from the outer line of defensive walls of Artaxata. A perfect view of the hills with the ruins of the ancient city can be observed from this spot. The survey covered roughly 52 hectares of fields and orchards around the alleged site of the inscription. This area was divided into "squares", adapting the actual size and shape to the field dimensions, property fencing, drainage ditches, etc., encountered in the area [*Fig. 4*].

Pottery and glass sherds, fragments of building ceramics and other small finds were collected during the field prospection and located within the borders of the grid of fields (plots of land). They were mapped with the aid of additional measurements taken with mobile GPS receivers [*Fig. 5*].

Fig. 4. Area south of Pokr Vedi: "squares" outlined in black and numbered in bottom right corner (Source Google Earth | drawing O. Kubrak)

The projet undertook to interview as many Pokr Vedi villagers as possible, collecting in effect important additional information, which helped to specify the findspot of the inscription. Unexpectedly, the interviews yielded new data on burials from the first centuries of the common era located in various properties. In the course of the interviews, the project was also able to observe and document modern trenches dug for the purpose of installing a sewage system. This provided extra data, especially on the site stratigraphy.

Aerial photographs were taken over the course of two field seasons. For this task, a DJI Phantom 3 Professional drone was used, operated by Armenian specialist Arshaluys Mkrtchyan.

Laser scanning with a Leica Geosystems scanner was used for parts of the area under study (squares 6, 6a and 8). The method was intended to capture any ground unevenness that could indicate the remains of camp embankments or ditches. Measurements of this type had not been part of the original project plan and were introduced to check out the potential of this device in the specific conditions of the site. The scanner was provided in cooperation with the Digital Humanities Lab of the University of Warsaw.

Geophysical prospection in the fourth and fifth seasons included magnetic and electrical resistivity surveys in areas selected based on the mapped clustering of ceramic finds dating from the first centuries of the common era and the tentative location of the site where the monumental Latin inscription was found according to the interviewed villagers. The magnetic survey was carried out with a Geometrics 858-G caesium magnetometer with an array of twin probes in horizontal configuration set 1 m apart. An ELMES ADA-07 alternating current device was used for


Fig. 5. Mapping of the distribution of 1st and 2nd century pottery and other ceramic finds (in red) in the area south of Pokr Vedi (Source Google Earth; University of Warsaw Pokr Vedi Project | processing O. Kubrak)

the electrical resistivity measurements, designed for archaeological geophysical and shallow geological testing.

Trial excavations carried out in the final stages of the project were aimed at verifying the results obtained by the non-invasive methods. Trenches were dug in three different locations chosen on the basis of an analysis of the accumulated survey data

## RESULTS

### AERIAL IMAGERY AND LASER SCANNING

An analysis of the aerial photographs of the region revealed no traces of buildings or any other structures that could be observed on the surface. The images were processed into orthophotomaps, which were later used to prepare an archaeological map of the area [*Fig. 6*].

The three-dimensional model of the terrain, which was the result of laser scanning of part of the area which is today completely flat, did not show any surface irregularities that could be interpreted as traces of the camp.

### GEOPHYSICAL PROSPECTION

Measurements were conducted in three different areas. Area 1 was located in square 11, the find place of the inscription according to initial assumptions. It

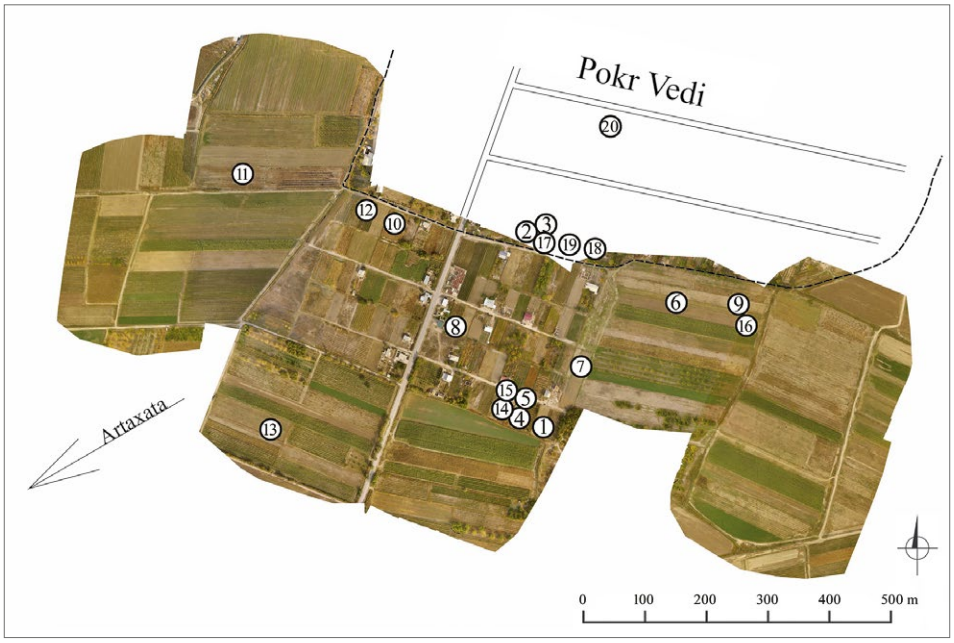


Fig. 6. Archaeological map of the area south of Pokr Vedi: 1–15 – loose finds [illustrated in ***Fig. 11***]; 16 – trench in square 8; 17 – trench in square 11; 18 – trench in square 12, findspot of the inscription; 19 – location of two burials in ceramic vessels; 20 – location of a burial in a vessel covered with a limestone slab (University of Warsaw Pokr Vedi Project | orthophotomap A. Mkrtychyan, processing O. Kubrak)

was part of a 50 m by 67 m plot adjacent to some modern buildings from the south [see *Fig. 4*]. An electric resisitivity survey was carried out here. Relatively low values of apparent ground resistivity predominated. Average values of ground resisitivity correspond to loamy natural layers. Linear anomalies with higher values can be interpreted as filled trences, dug probably for modern irrigation and water supply systems, as indicated by anomalies in places where elements of the irrigation system could still be observed on the surface.

Further analyses involved using various color scales and three-dimensional models of the distribution of apparent resistivity values. As a result, apart from the changes described above, a set of narrow linear anomalies was isolated, the right angles forming a structure measuring 4 m by 4 m [*Fig. 7*]. The structure is located in the vicinity of other, more pronounced anomalies, which could be associated with the presence of the irrigation system. The less pronounced nature of the image of the regular structure could be an indication of its lying at a greater depth.

Area 2 was located in square 8 [see *Fig. 4*]. Magnetic field intensity measurements covered an area measuring 1.17 m by 2.62 m. Linear anomalies were detected, the source of which is the difference in the magnetic susceptibility of the fill (in the case of submerged features) or polar anomalies at the borders of the trenches (a moat) and embankments. The anomalies could reflect either features deliberately manmade or natural (mounds accumulated in place of the former riverbed). To check out this element, additional prospection with the electric resitivity method was carried out in two areas (plots of land). cutting across these features at a right angle [*Fig. 8*].

In the case of the northern plot, the western border of the zone of increased resistivity was clearly recorded, while on the southern plot both the western and eastern border of the anomaly were visible. The observed differences could confirm the hypothesis presented above

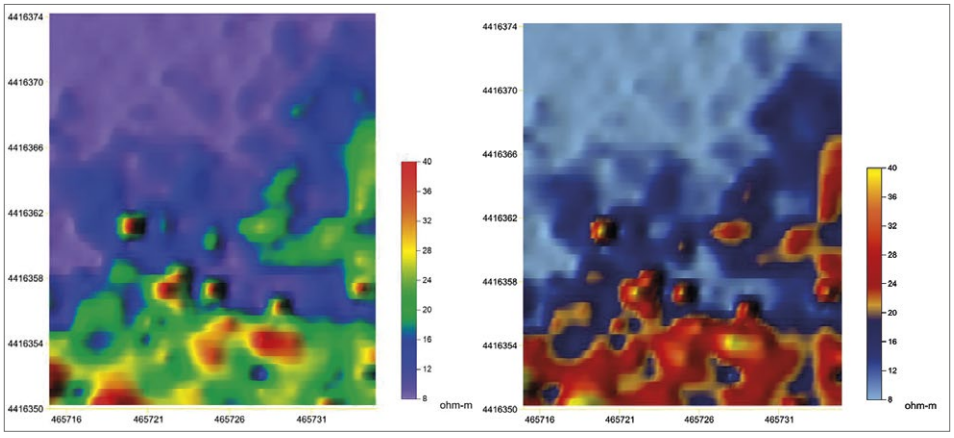


Fig. 7. Ground resistivity survey in Area 1 (values in the range of 8-40 ohm-m) (University of Warsaw Pokr Vedi Project | processing K. Misiewicz and W. Małkowski)

that the structure observed on the western plot may be of natural origin, while that on the eastern plot is the effect of anthropogenic changes.

Area 3 was located in square 2. The highest concentration of ceramic material was recorded in this area, including finds of sigilata-type vessel sherds. Two excavation areas (A and B) [*Fig. 9*] were traced here, on two different plots of land where construction projects were going on. It was not possible to distinguish anomalies that could be directly related to archaeological structures. Strong anomalies on the borders of the surveyed area were caused by modern construction, masking in effect any minor changes in the location of potential archaeological remains. A narrow dipolar anomaly on the north–south axis was probably caused by a modern water-supply system running to the buildings north of the survey area. After limiting the analysis of the calculated gradients of the horizontal component of the total magnetic field strength vector, narrow parallel linear anomalies were visible, which probably resulted from deep ploughing conducted in the past. Additionally, the maps and three-dimensional models prepared for region B in area 3 did not show any significant changes that could be associated with remains from the Roman period [*Fig. 10*].

## FINDS FROM THE FIELD SURVEY

### Pottery

The surface surveys collected a total of 1447 potsherds, which were on the whole identified and dated. Only 19 finds, i.e., 1.3% of the entire collection, were attributed to before the Roman occupation of the province of Armenia. Of the entire collection, 207 vessel sherds were assigned to the end of the 1st and early 2nd centuries AD. Statistically, this amounts to 14% of the collection. By far the largest group, 1091 pieces (i.e., 75.3% ), is made up of pottery from the period of

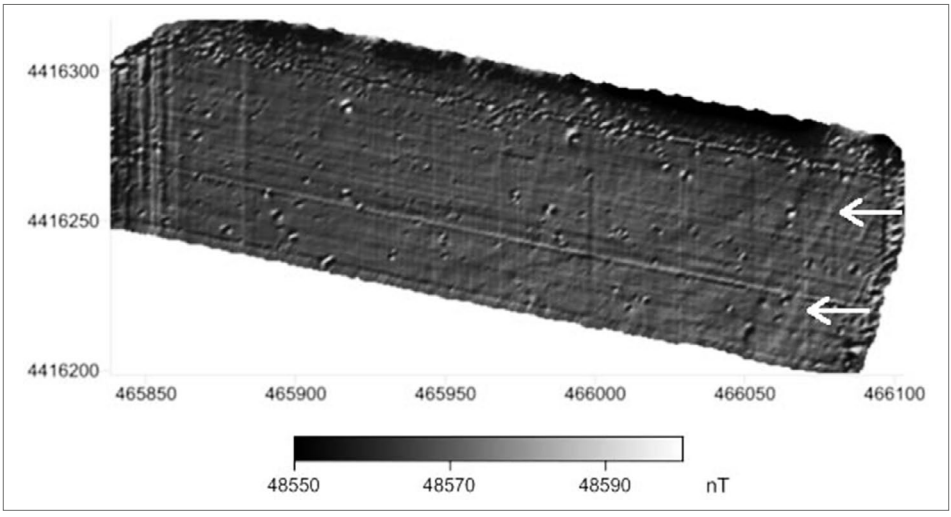


Fig. 8. Magnetic map of Area 2 (values in the range 48550–48600nT in greyscale. from dark to light) (University of Warsaw Pokr Vedi Project | processing K. Misiewicz and W. Małkowski)

Fig. 9. Location of magnetic prospection (parts A and B) in Area 3 (Source Google Earth; University of Warsaw Pokr Vedi Project | processing K. Misiewicz and W. Małkowski)

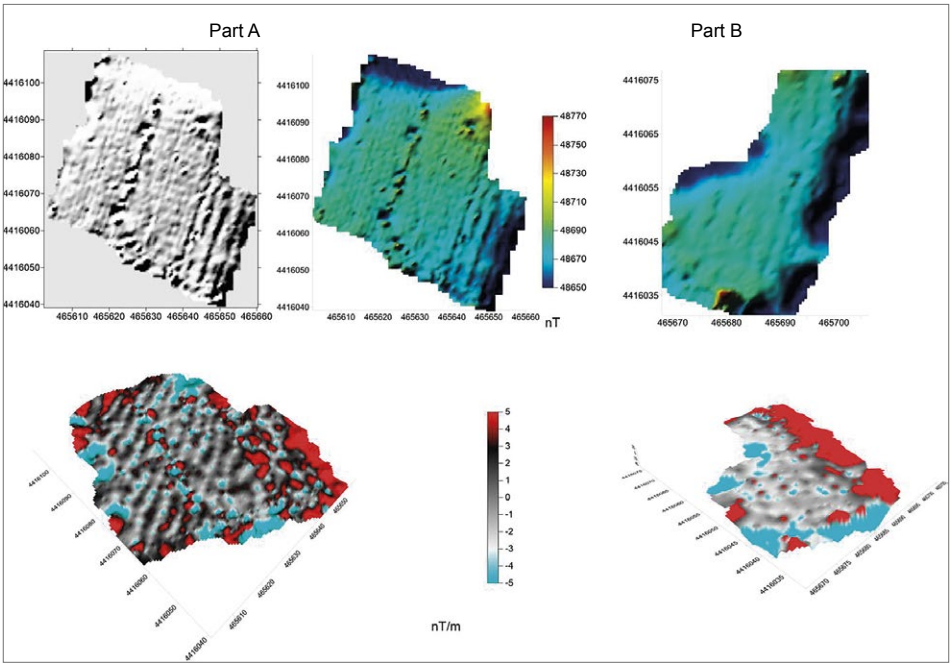


Fig. 10. Magnetic mapping of Area 3 (University of Warsaw Pokr Vedi Project | processing K. Misiewicz and W. Małkowski).

the influence of the Ilkhanate (13th–14th century; 16 fragments) and early modernity (15th–19th century). 130 of the collected sherds remain unidentified.

Several clusters of pottery from the Roman period were distinguished [see *Fig. 5*]. The highest density of vessel sherds from the first centuries of the common era was noted in the fields on the southern border of the village. There were much fewer finds on plots located at a greater distance from the buildings. Most of the collection consists of body sherds with very few rims, handles and bottoms/bases in evidence. The material was compared to a reference assemblage from excavations in the nearby town.

Local pottery fabrics are characterized by sand as temper, the frequency being a maximum of 5 grains of sand per $cm^2$. Basalt grits as temper were much rarer. All the vessels were baked in an oxidizing atmosphere.

Table 1. Selected finds (vessel and building ceramics) from the survey of southern Pokr Vedi [illustrated in ***Fig. 11***]; the inventory number indicates position, season, square and ordinal number, fabric colors given according to Munsell Soil Color Charts

| | ACNO | Type and form | Fabric (Munsell)/temper |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | PV-01/1/1 | Tile, Corinthian style; traces of finger brushing | 5YR7/8; black inclusions, lime particles |
| 2. | PV-01/11/2 | Chunk of mortar | 5YR8/1; pyroxene particles/basaltic dust 1–2<$cm^2$; sand 6<$cm^2$ |
| 3. | PV-02/28/2 | Fragment of limestone, decorated with a horizontal line | 7.5YR9.5/1 |
| 4. | PV-01/2/2 | Thin-walled pottery, body and rim fragment; horizontal grooved line | 5YR6/8; black inclusions |
| 5. | PV-02/2/2 | Body sherd with zigzag pattern in relief | 5YR7/6; sand 1<$cm^2$, lime particles |
| 6. | PV-01/8/8 | Body sherd with painted horizontal bands, one wide and one thin | 5YR6/8; black inclusions |
| 7. | PV-02/3/3 | Body sherd | 5YR7/3; basaltic dust 3>$cm^2$ |
| 8. | PV-01/10/1 | Thin-walled pottery, body and rim fragment, painted with darker stripes | 5YR6/8; mica |
| 9. | PV-01/8/2 | Body sherd with ribbing, sooted | 5YR5/4; sand 2<$cm^2$, mica |
| 10. | PV-01/31/1 | Body sherd with painted horizontal stripes | 5YR7/4; sand 1<$cm^2$, black inclusions, limestone particles |
| 11. | PV-01/18a/1 | Body sherd with painted horizontal, red and white stripes | 5YR8/4; black inclusions |
| 12. | PV-02/29/5 | Red-slipped ware, body sherd with horizontal stripes | 7.5YR6/6; black inclusions |
| 13. | PV-02/53/2 | Body sherd, slipped, painted dark horizontal stripes | 5YR 7/4; sand 1<$cm^2$ |
| 14. | PV-03/2/20 | Buff-slipped ware, body sherd with red painted figural decoration | 7.5YR8/4; sand 2<$cm^2$, black inclusions, limestone particles |
| 15. | PV-03/2/30 | Body sherd with horizontal painted decoration: red lines (2.5YR 5/8), green waves and other unidentified shapes (7.5YR 5/1) | 10R8/3; sand 4<$cm^2$, black inclusions |

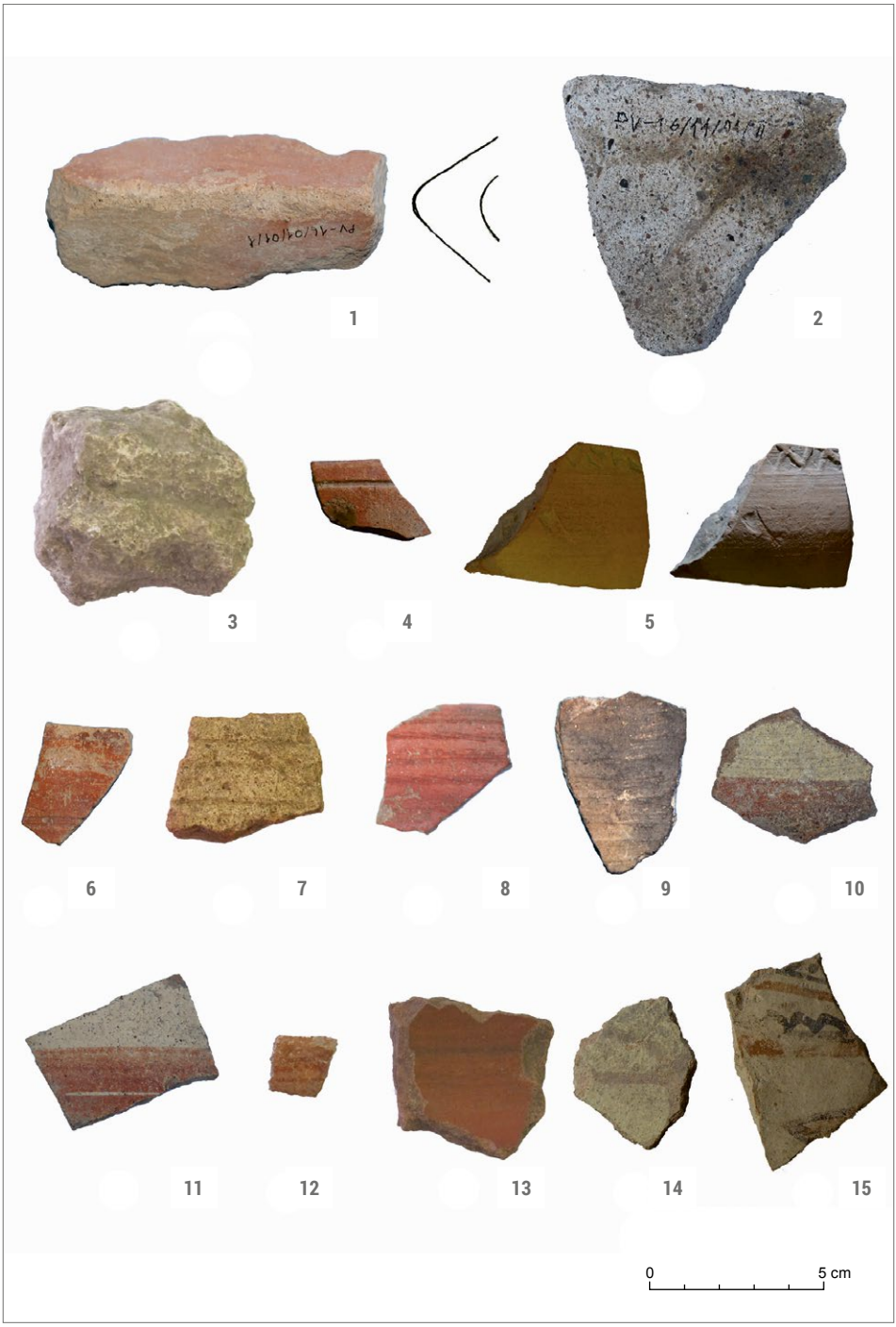


Fig. 11. Ceramic fragments and other finds from surface surveys, (for identification see ***Table 1***) (University of Warsaw Pokr Vedi Project | photos A. Trzop-Szczypiorska and O. Kubrak)

Sherds of cooking ware show evident traces of use in the form of staining and sooted surfaces [*Fig. 11:9*]. The tableware is decorated mostly with horizontal stripes [*Fig. 11:4,6*] and ribbing [*Fig. 11:7,8,9*]; some pieces were decorated with painted, dark red, narrow [*Fig. 11:12,13*] or wide [*Fig. 11:10,11*], horizontal lines. Similarly decorated ceramic material is known from Artaxata (Arakelyan 1974: 55; Khachatryan 1998: 125, 130). Some fragments have white, yellow, green or light red slipware. A body fragment with zigzag decoration [*Fig. 11:5*] is particularly noteworthy. This is one of the few examples of vessels decorated in such a manner, both inside and outside the city walls.

A painted vessel sherd with a figural representation that is difficult to reconstruct was also discovered. The find is dated to the first centuries of the common era [*Fig. 11:14*]. The collection also includes 15 fragments of thin-walled sigillata-type tableware. Most of them come from squares 2, 6, 6a and 8 [see *Fig. 4*].

## Building ceramics

A fragment of a V-shaped imbrex-shaped tile was discovered during the survey stage of the project in square 1 [*Fig. 11:1*]. The artifact dates to the turn of the 1st century AD. Similar tiles are known from Artaxata (Kanetsyan 1998: 66–71). The presence of a Corinthian-styled tile is not surprising as it was extremely popular in North Africa

Fig. 13. Ceramic tile with a LEG IIII SCYT stamp (University of Warsaw Pokr Vedi Project | photo O. Kubrak)

Fig. 12. Ceramic floor slab (University of Warsaw Pokr Vedi Project | photo O. Kubrak)


Fig. 14. *Pedales* brick fragment (University of Warsaw Pokr Vedi Project | photo O. Kubrak)

and the eastern provinces of the Roman Empire, introduced there to some extent by the Roman army (Mills 2005: 22).

Excavations in square 12, near where the inscription was allegedly found, yielded a square ceramic tile, measuring 36 cm to the side and 20 cm thick [*Fig. 12*]. Similar ceramic building elements with the LEG IIII SCYT stamp are in storage at the archeological base camp in Lusarat [*Fig. 13*]. In the same trial trench, two 24-cm-long and 4–5-cm-thick square bricks were also discovered [*Fig. 14*]. The bricks can be classified as *pedales*, i.e., with the side lenght equal to one Roman foot. Similar finds are known from the fort at Gonio/Apsaros (Karasiewicz-Szczypiorski et al. 2018: 497). These building ceramics may be associated with an unidentified building, the remains of which were found in the same trench as the building inscription mentioning the *Legio* IV *Scythica* (Arakelyan 1982: 19).

## Glass vessels

Three glass vessel fragments from the survey collection were found in square 12 (two pieces) and square 11 (one shard). These are remnants of vessel bottoms, which are likely dated to the 1st century AD. However, it should be noted that the identification of the finds and their typological classification is not certain.

The first fragment is a footed vessel bottom made of a light green glass [*Fig. 15:1*]. It seems to be a fragment of a shallow plate (Isings form 47; Isings 1957: 62). According to Isings, forms of this kind appear in Pompeii and date to the times of Claudius and Nero. A similar form of dish was found, e.g., in the Roman Bakar cemetery on the Adriatic Sea in Croatia, where it was dated to the mid/second half of the 1st century AD (Gregl and Lazar 2008: 102, Pl. I:2). The ring base is 5.9 cm in diameter. Cylindrical drinking bowls of Isings form 85a with a similar bottom (Isings 1957: 101–103) have been found among the material from the northern cemetery in Este, dating from the end of the 1st–beginning of the 2nd century AD, and Colchester with layers from the 2nd–3rd centuries AD (Cool and Price 1995: 82–85, Figs 5.12:518–520).

The second fragment comes from a vessel of yellowish green glass [*Fig. 15:2*], probably part of a drinking bowl or goblet, which can be dated to the 1st century AD. Vessels belonging to Isings form 12 have a similarly shaped bottom, decorated with horizontal grooves (Isings 1957: 27–30), found, for example, at Novae (M. Wagner, personal communication).

The last fragment [*Fig. 15:3*] seems to be part of a goblet or a cylindrical bottle (Isings 1957: 67–69; Isings form 51) with a small diameter of the bottom, 4.7 cm, produced in the second half of the 1st century AD.

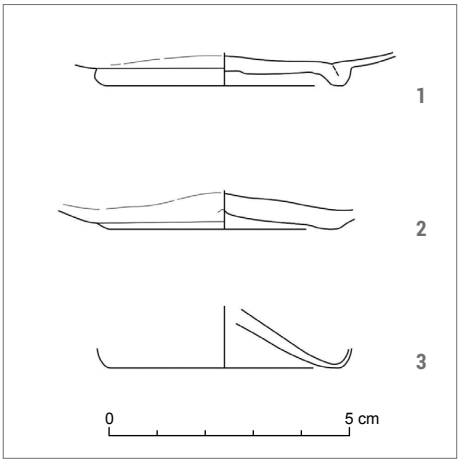


Fig. 15. Glass vessel fragments (University of Warsaw Pokr Vedi Project | drawing M. Wagner)

## Other finds

Not far from the alleged findspot of the monumental inscription in the eastern part of square 11 [see *Fig. 4*], the field survey collected two building-related artifacts: a chunk of mortar [*Fig 11:2*] and a fragment of a limestone block [*Fig. 11:3*]. Based on the stratigraphic context, these finds can be dated to the first two centuries of the common era. Researchers working for years in the Artaxata area consider this kind of mortar as a characteristic "Roman concrete". Another find is a worked piece of limestone, most probably part of an architrave.

Information about discoveries made in the past, not previously reported to archaeologists, came from interviews with teh village residents. Apart from the burials (see below), pottery fragments are found frequently in the gardens. In addition, the construction of a primary school unearthed the shafts and bases of columns made of limestone (Khachatryan 1981: 25). The school building is located about 800 m north of where the inscription was discovered. Some of these architectural elements could be traced with the help of Armenian colleagues. in the stores at the archaeological base in Lusarat. They were never documented, much less published.

Other similar column shafts and bases, probably from the same context, are located near the St James Church in Ararat, about 12 km away. One column fragment was moved to a local cemetery to serve as a gravestone. The column shafts had no flutings and the bases were characterized by a simple profile consisting of the plinth and torus. These architectural elements most probably come from several different contexts and can be assigned to two different collections. The first is made up of column shafts and corresponding bases with diameters of, respectively, about 30 cm and 34–36 cm. The second collection consists of column shafts and corresponding bases with diameters of, respectively, 52–55 cm and 67 cm. All the architectural elements found during the construction of the school appear to belong to the first of these groups. The source of the second group of architectural elements is still open to question.

## Modern construction/industrial trenches

Modern building trenches in square 10 [see *Fig. 4*] revealed that the cultural layer from the first centuries of the common era is located at a depth of about 2 m. Trenches dug for the instalation of a modern sewage system next to the houses in the southern part of the village were also documented in the course of the interviews with Pokr Vedi villagers. A deep construction trench could also be inspected in one of the fields in square 10 [see *Fig. 4*]. The stratigraphic sequence visible in the sections of these trenches showed that the cultural layer from the 1st and 2nd centuries AD can be found at a depth of 1.50–2.00 m throughout the studied area. This could well explain why there are no remains of the Roman camp visible on the surface.

A deposition nearly 1 m thick overlies the ancient layers. It is most probably an alluvial deposit formed by river activity. The riverbed (of the main river course or possibly one of its estuaries) must have once been located in the immediate vicinity of modern-day Pokr Vedi.

## Archaeological excavation

Trench 1 in square 8 [see *Fig. 6:16*] was excavated to verify the registered geophysical anomalies (see above). The 10 m by 3 m trench crossed the linear anomaly at right angles. At a depth of about 2 m, natural layers were recorded confirming that there had been a riverbed in this spot. The anomaly was generated by gravel and sand lying in the riverbed. These materials clearly stood out against the background of clay layers [*Figs 16,17*]. No signs of human intervention were observed in the trench.

Trench 2 in square 11 [see *Fig. 6:17*] was located on the spot indicated by the Armenian participants of the project as the findspot of the monumental inscription as well as tombstone of a soldier from *Legio* I *Italica*, floor and columns. Geophysical testing had recorded four narrow linear anomalies with visible right angles forming a 4 m by 4 m structure. However, the verifying excavation did not confirm any traces of human activity other than modern trenching.

Trench 3 in square 12 [see *Fig. 6:18*] was located on a spot located about 100 m east of Trench 2, indicated by a witness of the 1967 discovery of the inscription, who had informed scientists about the find. A geophysical survey was not possible in this place because of the proximity of modern residential and farm buildings and of an orchard with trees of various age. The shape and dimensions of the trench depended on available space, 15 m at the longest and up to 6 m wide. Fragments of "Roman concrete", similar to the piece discovered during the surface survey in square 11 (and presumably to mortar dug in 1967), were found at a depth of roughly 2 m [see *Figs 4; 6:2*]. Other finds included a ceramic slab, most probably a floor tile [see *Fig. 12*] and a brick [see *Fig. 14*]. In addition to these finds, the site abounded in pottery fragments dating to the 1st and 2nd centuries AD. Among the sherds were body fragments of a pithos, various tableware, including thin-walled local products (for a review of some of the finds, see *Table 1* and *Fig. 11*]. A fragment of a glass vessel was discovered at the same depth as the said artifacts [see above and *Fig. 15:1*].

## Graves

Three burials in the village were reported by village residents interviewed by the Project team. The first two were found in the eastern part of square 11 [see *Figs 4; 6:19*], in some of the house gardens. According to the accounts recalling these dicoveries, these were skeletal burials in large ceramic vessels, lying at a depth of about 3–4 m. Neither the human remains nor accompanying artifacts were disturbed by the landowner. The data concerning burial form and depth of the graves correspond to other known examples of ancient graves from this area (Khachatryan 1981: 6–30).

The third burial was discovered next to the house at 16 Janik Duryan Street while digging trenches for a new sewage system [see *Fig. 6:20*]. The grave discovered in the cut appears to be from the 1st or the turn of the 1st century AD. It was a large storage vessel with human bones inside, covered with a limestone slab. From the farmer's account it is known that the burial was located at a depth of about 1.50 m. The vessel was located on an east–west axis, its mouth facing west.

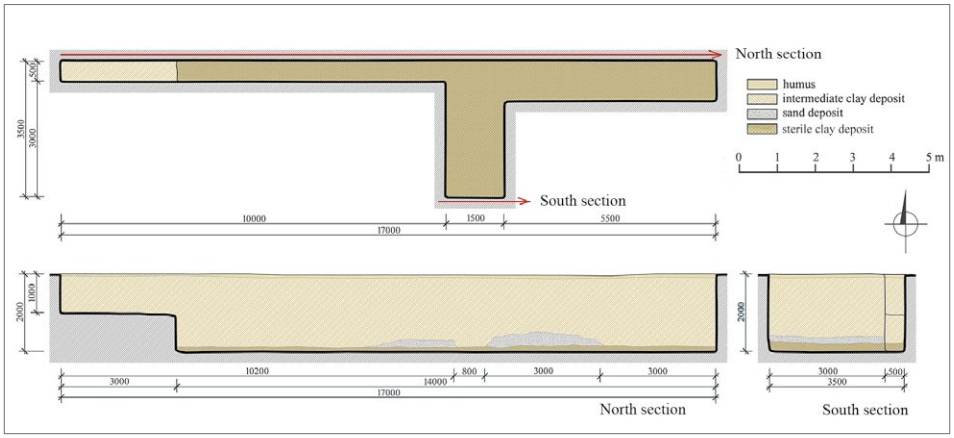


Fig. 16. Survey trench in square 8 (University of Warsaw Pokr Vedi Project | drawing S. Muradyan)

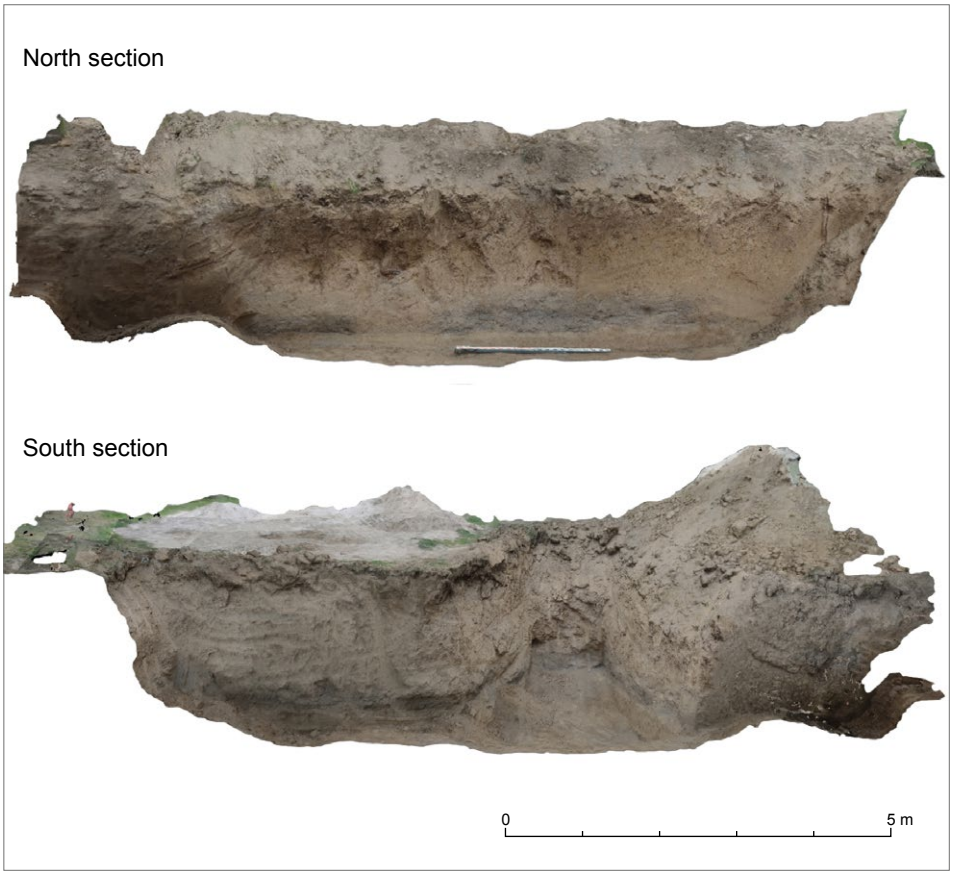


Fig. 17. Three-dimensional model of square 8, cutting through the former riverbed: top, section looking north; bottom, section looking south (University of Warsaw Pokr Vedi Project | O. Kubrak)

Previous research in the early 1970s uncovered two other similar burials in the same place. Several graves of this type were also discovered in the area of ancient Artaxata. All of these inhumations were made in large storage vessels covered with a limestone slab. In a recent discussion of these burials, Hayk Gyulamiryan (2018: 161–165) discussed the grave discovered at 16 Janik Duryan Street, but failed to note the graves from square 11.

## DISCUSSION

In the early stages of the project, neither laser scanning of the ground nor aerial imagery revealed any uneven surfaces or other anomalies that could not be seen on the ground. Stratigraphic observations made later in the field indicated a uniform natural covering of the entire site with layers of river silt up to 2 m thick, superimposed on the cultural layer from the 1st and 2nd century AD. This natural levelling layer could have completely obliterated any traces of even such extensive structures as the ditches and embankments surrounding a Roman military camp.

A ground survey proved to be the most effective method, locating several clusters of finds that could be associated with the Roman army stationed here for a couple of years or other types of human activity at the beginning of the common era. These clusters of finds were subsequently investgated with geophysical research.

In the final stage of the research, excavations were carried out to verify the results of non-invasive prospection. However, nothing in the way of architectural features or depositions unequivocally connected with the alleged camp of the Legio IV Scythica could be found. Nonetheless, the collected data have improved the understanding of the area beyond the walls of Artaxata.

One of the objectives of the project was to locate and investigate the site of a monumental inscription connected to a Roman legion discovered here in 1967. Residents interviewed for this purpose suggested a spot in square 12, which was subsequently excavated, revealing a stratigraphic sequence and small finds that confirmed occupation in the first centuries of the common era. The spot was presumably somewhere very close to where the two inscriptions, architectural elements and remains of an unidentified building had been found over half a century earlier. However, there were no traces of a cemetery, let alone a riverbed, in this part of the site.

Evidence for a nearby river in the beginning of the common era, were confirmed in a trench in square 8. The results have proved important for a future reconstruction of the landscape around Artaxata and the spatial development of the city's hinterland. It was previously believed that the city had been founded at the confluence of two rivers, the Araxes and the Metsamor. However, the course of the tributary of the Araxes from the heyday of the Armenian capital remains unknown for the period in question. More could be learned on this issue with augerhole drilling in the area between Pokr Vedi and the ruins of Artaxata.

## CONCLUSION

The project yielded no conclusive proof of the a legionary camp from Trajan's times at the site on the southern borders of the village Pokr Vedi near ancient Artaxata. However, the collected data have made it possible to narrow down the area for further research. The ancient riverbed was traced, and so was the site of a cemetery from the beginning of the common era. The research also tracked the most probable findspot of a monumental building inscription and other finds accompanying it, supplementing the contextual data on the building activities undertaken in the area by the *Legio* IV *Scythica*.

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Abbreviations

| | |
|---|---|
| *AE* | *L'Année épigraphique* |
| Cass. Dio. | Cassius Dio, *Roman History* VIII. *Books 61–70* (=*Loeb Classical Library* 176) (E. Cary and H.B. Forster, trans.). Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995 |
| *CIL* | *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* |
| Plut. *Vit. Luc.* | Plutarch, *Lives* II. *Themistocles and Camillus. Aristides and Cato Major. Cimon and Lucullus* (=*Loeb Classical Library* 47) (B. Perrin, trans.). Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1914 |

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